



Chairman Oelslager, Vice-Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley and Members of the House Finance Committee:

**Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to you today to request your support of a critical and time-sensitive workforce amendment that we are seeking in Substitute House Bill 110.** My name is Pamela Priddy and I am the Chief Strategy Officer of Necco, a foster care, independent living, residential and behavioral health company founded in 1996 in South Point, Ohio in Lawrence County. To date, Necco has built over 25,000 families and completed over 5,000 adoptions in the four states in which we operate, including Georgia, Kentucky, West Virginia, and of course, Ohio.

Headquartered in Cincinnati; we also have foster care and behavioral health locations in Cincinnati, Dayton, South Point, and Columbus. In addition, Necco provides services to young adults that have aged out of foster care and are transitioning into adulthood through our independent living program.

We also have a sixty (60) bed residential facility, The Necco Center, for boys ages 9-22 with an intellectual delay and a dual diagnosis in Pedro, OH. All total, Necco Ohio includes 400 dedicated employees, and serves over 250 foster families, nearly 400 foster youth, over 1,000 outpatient children and families, and nearly sixty (60) youth at The Necco Center at any given time.

**Necco is seeking a two-part amendment to Substitute House Bill 110 to help us address crucial workforce issues in our foster care programs.**

**1) Change to Home Assessor Requirements**

The first part of the amendment relates to the education and licensure requirements necessary for an individual to be employed as a "Home Assessor". Under Ohio law, a Public Children Services Agency (PCSA), Private Child Placing Agency (PCPA), or Private Noncustodial Agency (PNA) hire Home Assessors to perform certain duties related to the placement of children in foster care or adoption. A Home Assessor performs duties such as completing an assessment or home study of the applicant, the applicant's family, and the applicant's home environment to determine whether the home would be safe and appropriate for children in foster care. Onsite home visits are conducted to assess the suitability of the home to accommodate the needs of all family members, including the foster children. The condition of the home is evaluated to determine whether it is clean, safe, comfortable, and in conformance with agency regulations.

In order to perform the duties of a Home Assessor, the individual must be employed by public children services agency, private child placing agency, or private noncustodial agency; and be, either:

- A licensed professional clinical counselor, licensed professional counselor, independent social worker, social worker, independent marriage and family therapist, or marriage and family therapist
- A student working to earn a four-year, post-secondary degree, or higher, in a social or behavior science, or both, who conducts assessor's duties under the supervision of a licensed professional clinical counselor, licensed professional counselor, independent social worker, social worker, independent marriage and family therapist, or marriage and family therapist
- A civil service employee engaging in social work without a license
- A former employee of a public children services agency
- An employee of a court or public children services agency

We are seeking to expand the individuals eligible to perform the duties of an adoption and foster care Home Assessor to include individuals who hold a bachelor's degree in certain human services fields. Specifically, sociology, psychology; guidance and counseling; education; religious education; business administration; criminal justice; public administration; child-care administration; nursing; family studies; and any other human services field related to working with children and families.

Expanding the individuals qualified to perform Home Assessor duties will assist with alleviating the staff shortages many public and private child placement agencies are experiencing. Individuals with bachelor's degrees in certain related fields are more than qualified to perform the duties permitted by a Home Assessor. Additionally, the states surrounding Ohio including Pennsylvania, Kentucky, West Virginia, Indiana and Michigan also have similar educational requirements.

## **2) Change to Professional Treatment Staff Requirements**

The second part of the amendment we are seeking would create parity between public and private foster agency requirements when hiring "professional treatment staff". Both private and public agencies hire "professional treatment staff" to provide rehabilitative services, home studies, clinical directions and supervise treatment of children in specialized foster homes. These individuals work one-on-one with the treatment foster families to provide support in the foster home.

Under current law, depending upon who hires the "professional treatment staff" – a public or private agency – the education and licensure requirements differ.

- If the "professional treatment staff" is employed by a private agency then the individual must be licensed (a licensed social worker, a licensed independent social worker, a licensed professional counselor, a licensed professional clinical counselor, a counselor

trainee, a licensed marriage and family therapist, a licensed independent marriage and family therapist, a certified chemical dependency counselor, a licensed medical doctor or doctor of osteopathy, a licensed psychologist, a master's level or registered nurse with responsibility for providing agency services for a child placed in a treatment foster home or a medically fragile foster home).

- However, if the “professional treatment staff” are employed by a public agency, the individual is NOT required to be a licensed. (See ORC 4745.41(E)). Rather, individuals employed by a public agency must meet the requirements in ORC 5153.112 and 5153.112 (which requires a bachelor’s or associate’s degree in a human services-related study; bachelor’s degree in any field and employed for at least two years in a human services-related occupation, or been employed for at least five years in a human services-related occupation.)

In order to create parity and fairness between the “professional treatment staff” employed by private and public agencies, and in an effort to address workforce shortages, we are seeking to remove the licensure requirement for individuals employed by private agencies and require the same education requirements and employment experience as is required for individuals employed by public agencies. Again, the requirements we are seeking for “professional treatment staff” employed by private agencies are in line with what surrounding states require as mentioned previously.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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